



Ice Lolly Review

Issue II 2020

Editor's Note

Issue 2 came as a surprise to us. Our original intent was to publish one issue each month, but due to the surplus of submissions Issue 2 is here two weeks early. We cannot express how thankful we are to receive so many submissions from so many talented writers. In the short span of our existence we have received over 50 beautifully crafted submissions from nine different countries and eight different US states.

In the ever-changing world we cannot stress how important writing is. It's a form of expression that involves not a syllable from the lips, not a word from the mouth yet can tear at the very soul of a person and can spark thousands of other voices. We urge any writer who appreciates or enjoys writing to continue to write. The world needs your voice and your talent.

Speaking of talent each piece and submission we have received was crafted with care and love. From the imagery to the wording, each piece was unique and delved deep into emotions and struck at our hearts. It has been such an honor and privilege to read every single one of your submissions.

Now, we would like to present works that displayed a true voice and a strong style, works that were sweet, sour, and bubble-gum flavoured, works that stuck to our teeth and left our tongues painted red and pink, aching for more. We present to you THE ICE LOLLY REVIEW ISSUE 2.

- The Editors of Ice Lolly Review.

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Departing From Home - Poem

By Farzeen Rashid

Pacing onto crisp pavement,
After years of childhood bliss.
One step towards my destiny,
Nudging the past to the rear end of my mind.
Sixteen years of breathing,
At last I'm venturing away,
Away from home.
Trickling into the streets of this suburb,
Like water through the gaps in rifts.
Gazing at the lines of houses,
Resting like brick statues before the very eyes of a sunset like fire.
Observing a hound bark at me from the drug addict's wrecked home,
And men smoking cigarettes,
Just another evening in the suburbs.
Ambling away from the clusters of several children,
Giggling on tricycles with a trail of bubbles following,
And playing with their toy water guns.
I'm departing from the glee,
Because I'm off to grow up,
Fleeing from my early days,
And pacing on the unswerving sidewalk,
To a grinning future.
Marching by the alleys I used to scamper through as a child,
And all the houses I've witnessed been constructed from scratch.
I'm eager to leave it all behind,
And race towards my world ahead.
The mourning crows cry as they devour waste from the garbage cans,
The looming cars move steadily into driveways,
Unravelling with families gone to grocery stores.
The sky is brimming with thousands of erupting fireworks,
Of flames and amber explosions.
The crows are chanting a deafening song,
Perched on blinking streetlights.
Reflecting on those past memories,
When they were just my present.
Flopped in a booster seat in the back of my mother's car,



On my way to elementary school,
The ABC's embedded in my head,
Back in 2010.

Smiling at that house at the end of the side street,
The one that's been under construction since 2004.

Oh all the demolished bungalows,
The middle class families and their fixation with building mansions!
Why would they destroy these lovely homes,
Furnished with years and years of a million happy memories,
Just to settle in a vacant house with nothing,
Nothing but work to do,
To make the home a memory aisle.

There's no point in caring,
Because I'm leaving it all behind.

Wandering on these suburban sidewalks,
I'm walking on a route of golden opportunity,
To an exceptional future.

Trekking away from the immature world of blowing bubbles and untold bicycle bliss,
To a new realm of discovery ahead.

One that entails a ladder to success,
And walking sidewalks to grasp independence.

I can't wait to go there,
Adulthood,
I can't wait to grow up.

Meet my destination,
And make a new home there.

But what if I turn back,
What if I change my mind,
And walk back to my childhood and my home?

What if I toss my future out the car window,
And sprint back to my home,
Of laughing children playing soccer on pavement road?

What if I quit this journey,
And miss the chances I never took?

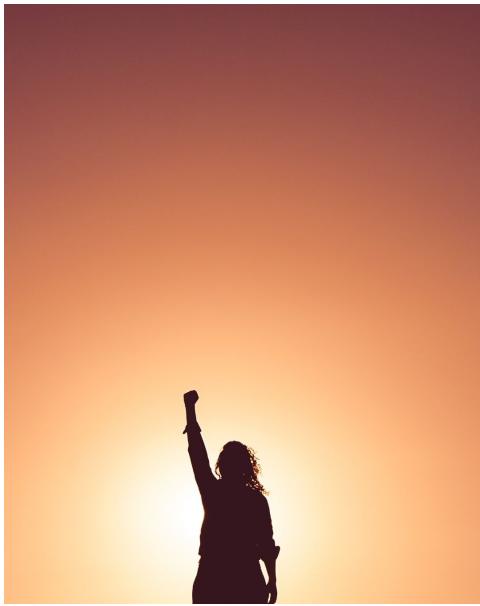
The infinite odds keep me striding forward on my feet,
What will my future hold?

I can see a beam of light ahead,
A glow of freedom.
It inhabits in faraway places,

And I can't grip it if I abandon this journey and walk home.
Still I fear the obstacles along the way,
I dread failing after struggling so hard,
Is it really worth forgoing this adventure now?
I have to walk,
But back at home all I did was play.
All this work,
Is it worth it?
I miss all the beautiful ordinary things,
The tears that caress these cheeks are filled with grief,
I'm losing everything I once held so spiritedly,
My grip is loosening,
Why have I chosen to let go,
Of my childhood?
The thought of this loss is what's holding me back from wandering alongside this unexplored road,
It utters to me,
Forcing me to turn back,
And walk home.
I'm unaware of where to go,
My feet have stopped,
And I'm inert and tense.
The flames are now peaceful,
And a black screen gently shades the sky.
It's getting dim,
Yet constellations haven't been noticed,
Still the streetlights illuminate the roadway.
Do I walk to my future,
Like balancing on a threadlike rod in the sky,
Or walk back home,
Live merrily once again?
I lay my back on the cold concrete road,
The path of survival,
Where cars come and go.
Resting my head to watch the starless sky,
I don't care about where I'm going.
I'm left bare minded,
Surrounded by two worlds divided.
Soundlessly laying on the road of survival,

An endless route of dreading destiny's hurdles,
Deciding to remain a child forever.
I know it's beyond the bounds of possibility,
To not grow,
So I'm choosing to linger for an obstacle,
And let it crush me softly.
When will a car come and glide,
Over my glum doleful face,
Impairing it in seconds?
When will it come,
So I don't have to breathe for the coming times,
And the memories that kill me for embarking on this journey,
When will it come so they perish too?
The rain has arrived,
Drizzling from the pitch blackness above.
Now heavily it falls from hellish thunderclouds,
My head rests in a murky pool of storm water.
It's done,
The journey is done.
All the faith I stored to reach the dazzle of my destiny,
Melted by this torrent,
And my irrational wits,
Shoving me into a thick marsh of beaming memories from the past.
The future,
It's gone.

Farzeen is 16 years old and she is a Pakistani girl born and raised in Canada. She started writing poetry when she was 15 years old, however, in quarantine, she's been sharpening up her skills more than ever. She has written over 85 poems, topic ranging from her personal experiences, to the flaws in our modern society. Her biggest dream is to publish an anthology poetry book, in other words, she wants to publish a collection of all her poems she wrote when she was a teenager. Alongside an author, she also desires to become a family doctor, to fulfill her childhood dream of pursuing a career in medicine. She is also the creator of a nonprofit organization, the Kindness Worldwide Movement. She is also the writer of the Kindness Worldwide Movement blog, which is an extension to the organization. She also has a Youtube channel dedicated to her art (crochet, embroidery, painting, drawing, and arts and crafts) called Farzeen The Artist.



Women - Poem

By Tanvi Paropkari

Know that you are a force of an ocean,
And you can fathom your own constellations.
Know that you are stronger than they see,
Remember you are smarter than they think you to be.
Don't stifle your spark, instead kindle it into a flame,
Let the world rejoice you and shout out your name....

The poet Tanvi Paropkari is in her teens, aged 15. She is from India and enjoys reading various books across different genres. She has taken to writing poetry as she feels she can express herself better through means of rhymes and poetic lines. She identifies herself as a feminist. She also loves to indulge herself in various arts and crafts.



A dead flower - Poem

By Siya Dhamijia

She was a flower decaying day by day
From pink to brown to black and grey
They kept her away from sunlight
There was just darkness all around
She was taught that the world outside is awful
And she will be tainted if she goes out there
But here she was thinking
of the butterflies that she could admire
Whenever she tried to bloom a little, her pot was covered with a cage
And slowly from flower she turned into sage
They never let her go in the garden
And her petals decayed to the end
Will she ever forgive them?

Siya is a simple girl who hails from a beautiful country India. Her diary, her pen, and her moon are her best friends. She believes in carpediem.



Oh the nights! - Poem

By Sanchi

Oh the nights!
Once again the clouds are not here
and the sky is so clear
Stars have marked their presence
Moon being the queen of the sky has revealed itself
Beauty of the moon with scars
loved by sun, it hides himself everyday
just to let his queen showcase her beauty
And the colour of sky, so soothing
Less darker than jet black
but a lot darker than a white light
Perfect blend of the colours that the
Whole cosmos bows in front of it.

Sanchi's patronus is a unicorn and is a universe believer. She loves the croissant crescent and the idea of it being full. She loves to talk about fireflies, stars, and books. She is a procrastinator who finds solace in writing.



Midnight Journey - Poem

By MeadowZ

My beloved friends,
Will you join me on a ride
 Into the night,
When everywhere is dark and silent?

We don't have to try
 To get any sight.
All you need to do
Is just enjoy the flight.

You may see something,
Or feel something,
Or smell something,
Or absolutely nothing.

But remember one simple rule!

You can only have this special journey,
When midnight visits.
 As there is a truth.
The most significant truth.

As suspicious as it sounds,
As mysterious as it can be,
Adventures solely become heart-thundering,
When comes the darkest sky of late night

MeadowZ is 26. She lives in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.



My Inspirations - Poem

By Sierra Jones

The sun rising, and shining, and providing;
The moon evading, and deceiving, and proclaiming;
The stars sparkling, and flying, and wishing;
The earth spinning, and growing, and alive -

That's what I'm inspired by.

Watching flowers of red, yellow, and pink bloom every spring;
Sipping slurpees while fireworks boom in the summer;
Jumping in leaf piles and making hand turkeys during the fall;
Singing carols round a fire with cocoa at the winter -

That's how I'm inspired.

Hidden smiles from a stranger when nobody's looking;
Laughs of loved ones when we're all together;
Grins belonging to boys I think I might like;
Smirks from enemies when they think they've won -

This inspires me a ton.

On the bad days when nothing goes right, and everything is wrong;
When the world is falling apart, and I just can't take it anymore,
and I think I'll cry until I'm sore,
I have to just keep on keeping on -

I'm even inspired on these bad days because my faith is never gone.

So, you see,
Inspiration is, to me,
Not something that just comes and goes.

Its presence is everywhere - in the things you love and the things you hate.
It's not about what they are or how they behave,

Having inspiration comes from those
Moments in time that touch you and show you.
They show you what is, what was, and what will be.

This is what inspires me.

Sierra Jones is an eighteen year old college freshman at Trevecca Nazarene University in Nashville, Tennessee. Sierra has lived in Nashville all her life, and is thrilled to be studying social work and creative writing in her hometown. She has been writing for fun ever since she was a little girl, but didn't take it seriously until her sophomore year of high school. That same year, she took a creative writing class and read one of her poems at an open mic night. In her junior year, she won a Silver Key Scholastic Writing Award for flash fiction, and an Honorable Mention Scholastic Writing Award for poetry. Though her senior year of high school was cut short, Sierra still made the best of it by starting a creative writing club at her high school and winning her school's english and writing award. She has also just started a creative writing club at her university, and can't wait for it to take off! Sierra wants to be a family counselor, and incorporate creative writing and journaling therapy in her counseling, as well as become a successful author herself. She is currently working on writing a collection of flash fictions and short stories that she hopes will be published in the near future.



Dead Carcass - Poem

By Roy

The best comes out from the dead carcass,
The worst comes from the appealing daffodils;
That took almost my life to grow.
It reminds me of Parker--
And her scares of being the country girl,
Where she could only languish with what;
She was destined to rot till death.
But unlike her, I don't have a Clyde,
To accompany me in the crimes;
Kissing me during the criminal tours.
Today there's hardly a bird I could listen to,
There's hardly the wind to entail my pain away;
But what lives is the dead carcass.
And there are the hands that lie,
With the smell of mechanical existence.
Candles among make the loudest noise,
And there's me looking at the dead;
Praying for life.

Roy aspires to become a writer someday and indulges herself mostly in painting and writing. She finds solace in diary writing, reading and listening to music. She regards music and observations to be the main source of the topics of her writings. She likes to write and compose works mostly in free verses and is trying to excel in the respective.

You are a princess - Poem

By Asenath Rose

you are a princess
your eyes drip gold
your tears run pearl
your roots spring silver

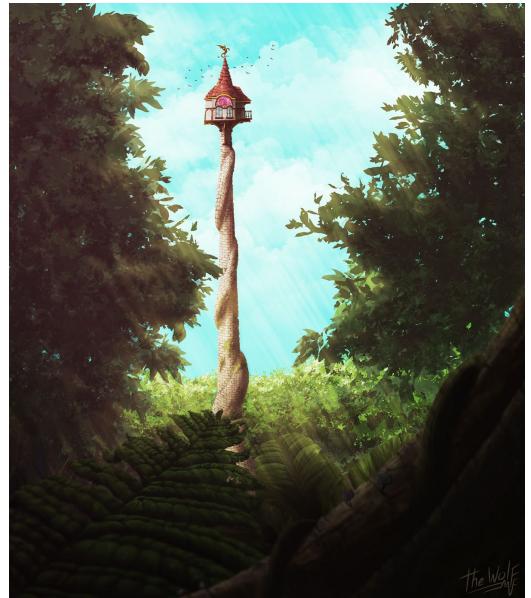
you are a princess
your ambitions consume you
your slimy scaly red ambitions
your high window almost conceals them

you are a princess
your notebooks are all full
your eyes are so crowded
your past is so empty

you are a princess
you invent a thousand reasons why
you must stay
but you really don't have to

Just Escape.
Your Good Fortune Is Already Written In The Stars.

Asenath Rose (she/her) is a fifteen-year-old from the USA's East Coast with deeply cliche New York City dreams. She writes poetry but favors songwriting, which she plans to pursue as a career. She plays guitar, bass, ukulele, lap steel, and banjo. Her favorite things include rainy days, coffee with a splash of milk, and blazers. She has previously been published in Teen Ink.





felicity sky - Poem
By Sarah Chaudhry

The blue sea stretches for what appears to be a never-ending infinity,
much like the blue sky with its brilliant white puffy clouds.
A sense of freedom and reflection encases and enlivens inside of me,
for here, by the shoreline,
with warm sand beneath my toes that keep me standing upright,
and the lightest of breezes that lap with the scuttling tide,
here I am reminded that I am one and free

Sarah Chaudhry is a fifteen-year-old sophomore in Queens, New York. She enjoys reading and writing more than anything in the world, aside from watching Marvel movies and coming up with ideas for short stories and poetry. Sarah has work published on Cathartic Literary Magazine and Ice Lolly Magazine as well as aspires to publish a novel (or two) of her own.



You're so pretty i can't help it - Poem

By Aida Guo

You're so pretty i can't help it
to look through the same pictures online again and again
Obsess over the gorgeous girl you're holding
Stare at the comments that radiate your popularity

You're so pretty i can't help it
You have the prettiest eyes
And they make obvious impressions on your perfect feed
I can't help but notice all your friends are gorgeous too

You're so pretty i can't help it
The pictures of your academic trophies
They shine in your eyes
Your success is casually, permanently printed on my screen

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You're so pretty i can't help it
The pictures of your academic trophies
They shine in your eyes
Your success is casually, permanently printed on my screen

You're so pretty
I'm so helpless.

Aida Guo is a 16 year old junior student in North Carolina, where she is the Editor-in-Chief of her school news site and school literary magazine. She loves teaching and talking with kids whether it be through art classes at or English tutoring sessions. She's involved in volleyball clubs and working towards environmental justice. In her free time, you can find her listening to indie and kpop music, cooking and baking food for her friends, and keeping thoughts in her diary.



Bimbo - Poem
By Victoria Spencer

I wonder if a bimbo
was someone who grieved too many thoughts she held dear
and whose back pocket mantras failed, so she emptied
willingly and let herself be someone else's worry.

I wonder if a bimbo
was someone who was choked with another's words
and decided she was for viewing and not hearing.
A mouth closed is better than a head full so
she only spoke of silly things.

I wonder if a bimbo
was someone who invested in being a plot twist
and for a laugh, staggered acquaintances
and people who summed her up using her test
scores and grades and her scandalous bare thighs.

Victoria Spencer is studying writing at the Alabama School of Fine Arts and lives in Birmingham, Alabama. She believes creative writing is one of the best ways to express thoughts and ideas.

Segments of freedom and painted lines - Poem

By Kshitija

ix. the boy who ceased smokes
diaphragm rises with every breath leaving lungs
the aroma spreads across the room.
cigarettes help with crises,
so he lit one.

viii. stay a little longer.
a woman's disguise
for wrists wrapped in bangles.
of glass.
shoulders tied to dreams but
waist with little babies
and
no one seems to give a shit.
you think, inept and weak fabrics cover
her scars.
she conquers it all.
dreams.

vii. war ends with no winners.
for those who win, loose great paratrooper
and caged boundaries left unearsed.
it's hard to locate nemesis.
soldiers in the battlefield are
quintessentially strong and self-contained.
sacrifice lives for they are smitten with motherland.

vi. stay out till 9.
wear decent denim during parties.
hold that iOS an arm away
it will strain the eyes.
parents guide through with.

v. my little sister touches a hot porcelain,
realizing the sense of pain
the quick stimuli withdraws her hand
lies a space within this nanosecond



of response and reaction a
space which can't see be seen.
space which in itself is but
a power to choose.
choose and react.

iv. I decide to open the cage door of our
30 year old parrot

he can't withstand life behind bars
neither can we.
Fly bird!

iii. in a remote village resides a girl
who waltz about choices as there are any to pick for.
her papa brings bunch of boxes.
powers her imagination.

ii. as a river, flowing between
boundaries
suitable within limits.
once crossed,
lies a havoc.

i. in body-
a temple, a graveyard
I guess, flowers bloom at such places
so we choose to take them there.
and an opinion on how that 16 year old died.
she was on yellow pills, depression hit the neuronic motions so she pressed blades
on wrists
and with her last breathe, was freedom.

Kshitija (She/Her), 18, a student and a budding writer from Mumbai, India. Her work portrays kaleidoscopes of mental health, identity, magic, visons, critiques, nature and timelines. She loves talking and finds meaning by narrating stories, being a spoken poet. In her spare time, she enjoys Ukulele, calligraphy and paper work.

Suburban Scales - Poem

By Madison Taylor

I read somewhere
That when a goldfish is in a bowl that's too small
The outside of the fish stops growing
But the inside, the heart and the bones, keeps growing
And if the fish stays in that small bowl
It dies
(It's called stunting)



I think that's how I feel
When I let cups of paint water and brushes rest on my sternum
And I wrap my lungs in camera film
And I find every hobby and every art that I can
To fill the spaces between my ribs

The paint is starting to bleed through paper and stain
And whisper of faraway places
So I take up writing instead
And I bleach the homesickness from my bones

I'm not really sure what's outside
I can only see my reflection in my bedroom mirror
And a shadow passes by
Before I look back to my pen's shadow on paper

I often wonder if goldfish in bowls are homesick for ponds and lakes if they have never seen them
If there is some sort of blood-borne ache throbbing deep under scales
That breathes "*I was made for more than this,*"
Or maybe the goldfish just swallows another goldfish pellet and forgets.

Madison Taylor is sixteen and in a suburb thirty minutes north of Chicago. She's an artist and works on glass art and jewelry making/metal art. She's also a part of the local fencing club, Crimson Blades. She's been featured in DePaul's best of highschool writing anthology and hopes to use writing to speak up about important issues.



But what if I fell in love with a poet - Poem

By Samina Parveen

but what if I fell in love with a poet?
poet and poetess
isn't it a dangerous couple
if he brings stars for me
then shall I get the ocean for him?
isn't poetry crazy?
if he personifies my voice as honey
i will compare his voice to the pitter-patter of rain,
soothing/cooling

we both will write with our inks flowing from nerve
and threads from his poetic heart connects mine.
I breathe his words in my breath
each word is breathtaking

but what if I fell in love with a poet
and we write in the moonlight
the sight
of a poet and poetess
writing the world in their lines.
each letter filled with love.

but what If I fell in love with a poet?
we lay back on the terrace
gazing the night sky, shining glistening upon us.
with our books and pen in hand.
ink is not merely to write
but what if I fell in love with a poet?

but what if I fell in love with a poet?
poets are dangerous
including my smile, midnight eye
in his dreamy simile
cinematic are his metaphors
he writes hyperbole my rough hair as smooth silky,
using it as a simile for soft fur.
he using my laugh as rhyme
mine looking good as a crime
but what if I fell in love with a poet?

this poetess is also
dangerous
remembering his hair, wave,
in my bliss
his presence is
stardust in enchanted rain
I will exaggerate his wink
as thunder in my chest
alliterated his flawless flirting
and closeness as clouds
pouring love in life
he'll bring the arc of vivid colors in my life
but what if I fell in love with a poet?

when my mood is off
neither do I want flowers nor chocolate
I just want you pearly lips to recite me a sonnet
or your special Shayari
your knitted sweater of words on my back
but what if I fell in love with a poet?

i want you to take me
on a date with you and your diary
on my terrace
escaping the reality
take me on a tour to a magical world
entry in your poems
and I will show you stars on my lips
with mine poetry
then

i fell in love with you,
also the poet!

*Samina is a 15 year old common girl from India with some uncommon dreams.
Writing is a part of her and words run in her blood. Her dream is to inspire the youth
and to be remembered as world changer.*



I was taught - Poem By Prachi

I was taught
Not to talk loud
I was taught
To stay away from the crowd
I was taught
To stay at home
I was taught
You are not allowed to roam
I was taught not to wear short clothes
I was taught
To never go anywhere alone
I was taught
I can never do anything by my own
I was taught
To stay silent against the violence
I was taught
Not to make any noise
I was taught
Don't raise your voice
I was taught to hide my scars
I was taught to keep everything inside and then I will be fine
I was taught to never share my pain
And unfortunately a life was lost again..

Prachi is a 17 year old girl who lives in panipat. She loves to write and she finds her happiness and peace in writing.

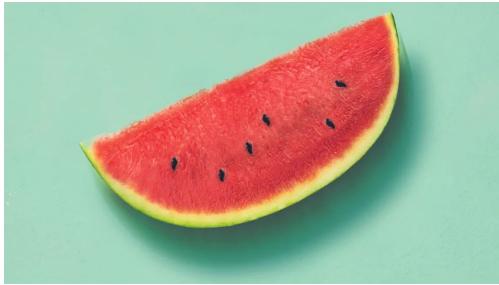


Innocence - Poem

By Valerie Mae

oh, the Innocence
of late summer nights,
early winter mornings,
oh, the Innocence
of birds chirping,
of ice cream slowly melting,
oh, the Innocence
all gone,
as we say we have grown up,
matured,
moved onto bigger, better things.
but really, all I've ever thought is,
what could be better
than that innocence we once had?

Valerie Mae is a 13 year old lover of all things creative, who lives in New South Wales, Australia.



Red Juice - Prose

By Shira Zur

“If you keep swallowing watermelon seeds, one day a watermelon will grow inside your stomach.”

Her mother’s voice was stern and followed by an urging frown, her dark eyebrows arched downwards and over her eyes, her forehead covered with wrinkles. The girl was only five then, and her small hands could barely hold up the heavy watermelon slice, red juice seeping out of the fruit and dripping down her hands and onto the blanket. The beach was crowded but they had their own little spot near the rocks, far enough from the splash of the waves but close enough to hear them crashing again and again against the yellow sand.

And, if the girl closed her eyes tight enough and all the noises of the seagulls flying and the waves crashing and the people talking faded away, she could truly feel it; a black seed burying itself deep down her stomach; a seedling emerging, lifting its head up slowly; the plump green ball growing bigger and bigger inside her stomach until one day, when it became the oval fruit she knew and loved. She opened her eyes and smiled, taking another bite of the slice in her hand. The red juice continued dripping down her hands. She continued swallowing watermelon seeds.

—
“If you go out in the cold with wet hair, you’ll get a fever.”

Her mother had already walked past the bathroom and into the kitchen when the girl looked up, her soaking hair tied in a messy knot, little droplets streaming out, soaking the mat on the bathroom floor. The steam from the shower fogged the mirror and the girl had been using her finger to trace circles into the fog when her mother had walked past. The girl looked up to her right. Outside the bathroom window, she could see the gray skies outside, the rain falling down and creating puddles in their muddy grass.

And, if the girl closed her eyes tight enough and let the steam from the shower engulf her, she could really imagine it; her going outside, her hair still dripping, working side by side with the rain; her legs shaking with every step, icy chills shaking her whole body; her coming back home, her nose red and aching; and finally, her huddled underneath layers of blankets, a mountain of used tissues growing larger next to her bed, the hot thermometer resting defeated on her bedside table. She opened her eyes and turned out of the bathroom, rushing down the hallway to get ready. Her mother did not see her drenched hair as she slipped out of the house.

“If you keep making that face, it will be stuck like that forever.”

The girl was standing by the door, waiting for the others to get ready, and decided to make silly faces in the mirror. She was not sure why she was making silly faces; maybe it was pure boredom, or maybe she was trying to tie down one more thing from her childhood before she completely let it loose. Her mother stared at her through the mirror, and although her posture was still straight and her face still tight, a soft grin formed on her face, and then vanished as quickly as it came.

And, if the girl closed her eyes tight enough and ignored her mother’s exhausted sighs, ignored the clock ticking away on the wall, ignored the spiral circling faster and faster inside her head, she could really picture it; her making the ridiculous face in the mirror one day; her eyes crossing over, looking down at the tip of her nose as everything else became a gray blur; her friends laughing until it wasn’t so funny anymore, an alarming panic starting to arise within her; and finally, her giving up, realizing that her face was going to remain cross-eyed forever.

She quit making the face and looked at her mother in the mirror. She concentrated on every detail; her thin nose, her large brown eyes, her ruffled eyebrows, her long, thick hair, just like the girl’s. She continued looking until her eyes hurt and every feature on her mother’s face overlapped and meshed together, forming one blurry image that did not look like her mother at all. Then, she blinked, refocusing her vision, and stared down at the tip of her nose, making a cross-eyed face, sticking out her tongue and giggling to herself.

One day, the girl was finally living alone, and she got to soak in the world with a fresh opinion, no mother around to restrict her outlook. She began looking for the little details, an insatiable mission, as there were infinite little details at every situation. And, once she began looking for these details, she also began noticing things.

She noticed that when people swallow watermelon seeds, they might get a stomachache, but the fruit does not grow inside their stomachs. She noticed that when people go out with wet hair in the cold breeze, they might feel a little chilly, shocked by the contrast from the hot shower, but they do not catch a cold. And, she noticed that when people make silly faces and their eyeballs move over to the side of their eyes and their red tongue sticks out, they might look a little stupid, but their faces do not stay like that forever.

Her mother had lied.

The girl was not a girl anymore, and as she sat next to her daughter on the beach, she looked out at the waves and breathed in the salty air and thought to herself. Her daughter sat on the beach towel, drawing circles in the sand, and her blabbers and giggles intruded the girl's thoughts. The girl sighed, smiling at her little creation, and turned to her bag, pulling out the bowl of watermelon slices she had cut that morning. She ripped off the saran wrap and handed her daughter a slice, her little baby hands still covered with sand. Her daughter let out another giggle, bent down, and took a large, messy bite out of the fruit, red juice dripping down her mouth and onto her chin.

The girl watched the droplets dribbling down, dissolving into the blanket. The red stain stretched itself across the fabric material, and the girl stared as it became blurrier and wider and it wouldn't stop and suddenly it wasn't just the stain that was bothering her anymore. She looked up at her daughter. A cold panic awoke inside of her and chills shot down her spine and legs and arms and she could see the hairs on her arms stand up defiantly, her body betraying her, and she couldn't think straight, the swarm of thoughts morphing together, creating a singular fear, the one she always wanted to avoid. The chills ran up her chest and into her lungs, and now it was too late; she knew she couldn't stop them. The fear found its corresponding words and they arranged themselves inside her mouth and she bit down on her tongue in a last effort to block the sentence she knew would come out but then her lips separated and her teeth let go of her tongue and she said:

“If you keep swallowing watermelon seeds, one day a watermelon will grow inside your stomach.”

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little joker bae steals sovereign emperor's yellow diamond *and fails* -

Prose

By Zoha Arif

Act 1: The Introduction

So, little joker bae settled in his pistachio-sized mind that the most extravagant way to brew revenge is to thieve the sovereign emperor's yellow diamond. One may assume that little joker bae feels inclined to steal his great kingship lider's prized yellow diamond because little joker bae feels wronged by his majesty. Mayhaps his majesty killed his first unborn child. Or mayhaps his majesty indulged himself in the most exotic sweets of the continent (Marie Antoinette-style) while the pauper's children rotted in the barn of their slavers waiting for some prophet all while their crusty ribs press behind their skin and their fingers readied themselves to steal buttery bread from the fat merchant's boy. Or mayhaps his majesty was a godless tyrant, saying that anyone who worships an idol or the al-mighty God of Muhammad and Jesus and Abraham and Moses and Jonah (and *whatever other demonic mud creatures "prophets"*), he shall be exiled after his burning.

But, no, the interesting thing is that little joker bae didn't have salt on whatever constitutional public works sovereign emperor, his high crowned potentate indulged his land in. His monarch did not have a toe in the assasination of his parents, the senators, and his brother, the curly red-head freckled Giovanni (in fact, his majesty had personally attended Giovanni's visitation and his queen had cried whilst his majesty put a hand on her cheek). His monarch was not the one who chained his hands to the pire and whipped him screaming (!)No mercy for the beyond-reasonable-doubt guilty convict(!) when he had stolen a swine (thieving was wrong, what little joker bae did was wrong, and he accepted his punishment as rightful). His monarch was a kind and fat old

man who taxed the rich, fed plump, fluffy baker boy's bread to the poor, and patched the holes in the tents of the beggars.

Now one may inquire about the morality of little joker bae's revenge because who would dare lay a tooth on a pure social worker like his majesty. To which I respond: the revenge that little joker bae thirsted for was in response to his own actions and sovereign emperor supreme ruler was merely an unfortunate middleman in the meddling. You see, when joker bae was twelve and a freshly orphaned pauper, little joker bae could not take the low foster-kid life and ran away from the foster kids' stables, leaving Old Geoffrey and his viking wife, Ama, to face the foster officers and swallow two months in the dungeons of the sovereign emperor for irresponsible parenting.

Meanwhile, little joker bae got away and became a ticket-booth clown for the circus because his limbs could not twist into any of the acrobatics the grand circus demanded of him. Now little joker bae was not devastated about the circumstances in which he found himself in, but he was desperate to send salutations and apologies to Old Geoffrey and Ama for the dungeon time and the whole bad-foster-parents scandal. So, one day, he sent a fiend, who introduced himself to joker bae as an esteemed world-class banker, to Ama and Old Geoffrey on account that this banker would give Ama and Old Geoffrey his thanks and deliver joker's repentance money. But not only did this banker fiend take joker bae's repentance money into his own pants, but he visited Ama and Old Geoffrey and thieved their gold and silver and opioids and clothes and left them and their foster children tied and gagged to the kitchen stove for two days. Worst of all, little joker bae didn't hear of the incident until two months after the fact, from a little 20-something sailor cracking up about a family, old woman and kids and all, gagged and tied and skin naked besides their kitchen stove for two days.

So, in short, little joker bae was to steal the yellow diamond and ship it to Ama and Old Geoffrey as the sincerest sorry he could muster for all of their troubles. And then he would figure out a way to repay the debt to the sovereign emperor whose queen was on her knees in sincere grief over his brother Giovanni.

Act 2: The Catastrophe

Morning of the 9th of August, little joker bae left the ticket-booth quarters and ran. He slaughtered a few pirates hauling single-base smokeless gunpowder and proved himself worthy of piratehood and thus earned a place atop Francis Bonny's sails. Francis Bonny convinced himself that the joker bae was a nice snatch, an exotic fresh member of his crew sailing to the New World. This ridiculous clown fiend couldn't be a mere gunner who floats around whatever state cargo ship will load him. He must be an experienced

first mate of a Jack Sparrow or Davy Jones guy because who else could so easily decapitate three of his men, one of whom was the son of his wife and heir to the thousand seas, Francis Barbarossa. Francis Bonny kept whispering this reality to himself on the foremast like a madman until, about halfway to the capital and one feisty storm later, Francis Bonny could not bear the death of Francis Barbarossa and feed his murderer silly whilst he's in pain and thus he made joker bae walk the plank.

Little joker bae walked Francis Bonny's plank and immediately drowned, but God's grace was upon him because his limp body washed upon a humble monk's island. The humble monk smacked the water out of joker bae's lungs and revived little joker bae. Joker bae had a few gold jakaratas in his pants and so he pressed them in the hands of the monk and said that he was sincerely thankful and that he would never be able to repay this debt of a life to him and all that lovey-dovey heroine mantra stuff. The monk, however, whipped the jakaratas back at little joker bae and said that everyone's debt is only to the one merciful just God and that one should not go after gold jakartas and other devilish worldly riches for these things will never repay one's debt to God. Little joker bae said that he was the prince of the atheists and thus he owed nothing to a fictional deity that he did not believe in. The humble monk would not eat the gold jakaratas, so, in the very questionable hours of the night, joker bae left the gold jakaratas in the monk's pillow so that he could feel that he had evened the debt with the humble monk whom he figured would use the gold jakaratas to sustain himself.

Joker bae then hopped on a passing rum ship, went to the capital, and promptly decided that it would be rude to visit Ama and Old Geoffrey without a visitation gift. He thus decided that it was best to at once venture to the castle of the sovereign emperor supreme ruler and steal the yellow diamond. He briefly considered rolling to the local pirate cove and finding Francis Bonny and decapitating the captain for attempted murder, but joker bae figured that Bonny man was just evening out the debt. Joker bae killed the ol' captain's son and his two crew veterans and, in revenge, Bonny tricked joker bae into his own trap. Technically, since joker bae had survived, this meant that joker bae owed a life to Francis Bonny in exchange for Francis Barbarossa's, but if you doubled the trickery and the week joker bae spent at the humble monk's island feeling his lungs cramp and sleeping in seduced dreams of water materializing into a spicy greek god who drowns him over and over and over again screaming (!)No mercy for the beyond-reasonable-doubt guilty convict(!), the debt canceled itself over. So he ignored the urge to seek Francis Bonny and went off to the sovereign emperor's purple bed.

Joker bae found the sovereign emperor's palace, bought a sledge hammer from a bunny-looking boy, and fought his way, very matter-of-fact heroically, into the sovereign

emperor's treasure cave. He retrieved the yellow diamond and was rolling out when he was ambushed by the king's scowling troops who then escorted him to the sovereign emperor and his high throne. The emperor, upon seeing little joker bae shoved down the high throne hall, at once remembered the red-headed freckled Giovanni and the mining accident in which he died and his former queen bent over the lad in tears at the loss of such a young, juicy life.

“Brett Bentley, of all people, you.”

Act 3: The Resolution

“You know what, I really owe you one sovereign emperor. You gave me bread, jam, sandals, and a nice fancy wild west cowboy hat with beaded jewels on it and such. Not to mention your attending Giovanni’s last show. That was a real act. You’re busy with important stuff and we never expected you to pull up like you did. Appreciate it bud.”

“Then why this betrayal, Brett? And after what you promised Giovanni on his deathbed too.”

“I’m the hot joker bae for the grand circus in Gath-hepher now. And Giovanni died mysteriously. I don’t remember much of the actual dying part.”

“Well, ah, Giovanni, my dear boy, loyal statesman, bless him my God, was stampeded over by scared mine workers after a false security breach alarm. And his lung cancer.”

“He died mysteriously.”

“He died in a mining accident, but, okay, let’s say he died mysteriously. What’s stealing the yellow diamond got to do with anything?”

“I have some debts to repay.”

“So you get a job as a nice homemaker boy or a gravedigger and make your own cash and repay those debts yourself. Not by stealing my yellow diamond.”

“It’s the state’s yellow diamond, sovereign, with all do respect. You don’t own nothin’, not this diamond or this big ol’ castle or those clothes poking your back. They’re charity from your people who trust you to do your emperor job.”

“So that it is. The state trusts this yellow diamond to me. It’s mine. And it’s up to me to use it to repay the state’s debts or to keep as our nation’s crown prize from our voyage in Argharab.”

“That’s nice.”

“Brett, son, sport, I’m going to put you in my dungeon for seven nights and six days and then I’ll let you go. You’re a nice boy and I know that this was just a one-time teenage-rebellion misdemeanor. Repent and don’t make me catch you and put you on trial next time.”

“Oh god, please, no. Sir, execute me instead—don’t do this seeing poor Giovanni itching to death in my eyes. It’s me, joker bae, Brett. I can’t get another yellow diamond for you. And, you like Ama and Old Geoffrey don’t you?”

“Sure, I respect their foster kid work. But that’s got nothing to do with anything.”

“So many of those kids are in debt to them. Some more than others. A job will not poof away this debt we have to them.”

“It’s charity. They’re good hearted people helping the unfortunate for the well-being of the future and—”

“But they have no expectation of us for their charity, no return charity. Other than growing into adults and leaving at the age of eighteen to live our splendid lives as citizens of this state and all that yammering.”

“Yes, so?”

“You’re in debt to your God. You can’t repay him. You sin.”

“My God is merciful and He knows that people are imperfect. While I do my best, that is enough for my God. I know it.”

“You don’t know your master. And what about the allies that help your state? And all the help of your first queen, how sweet she was to you. And your sons and their military stunts and the honor they bring. And your daughters and the beauty they toil for.”

“It’s not a one-way debt. I help them too.”

Joker bae smashed the yellow diamond with his sledge hammer. The sovereign emperor shot up from his mulberry silk cushions and cried.

“Now why would you do that, Brett, you joker!”

“The yellow diamond is no more. You have it easy, sovereign emperor, your highness. Debts are expected of you, two ways. You can show it as duty for you, but, this all, is a special kind of hell for me. I can’t take a cookie from no one without feeling like a beggar.”

“Brett, listen here, if you think that this is a prince way to repay Geoffrey and Ama, you best get a psychiatric check-up and a slipper or two.”

“I owe a ton to the circus too. And even that damn Francis Bonny and his first mates and his crew. Hell, I owe the shoe cleaner and that scraggly old man who fixed up a boo boo for me. And that monk! I almost drowned on the ship ride here and an old monk fixed me up great and wouldn’t take a coin for it. And if your God happens to be real, throw him to the pool party too!”

A girl then strolled into the high throne hall, excused herself for the sudden intrusion, and then announced to the sovereign emperor that she will be departing shortly.

“Please, at least take the sweets with you,” the sovereign emperor said, “You have a long journey ahead of you. And you didn’t taste the things from my palace, not last night nor this morning. You must at least finger the sweets.”

“I really should be minding my diet,” the girl said, “and with that small heart condition I was telling you about, I say that you enjoy them.”

“Alright. But you must get a taste of my queen’s blessed cheesy apple pie one day.”

“I already have, sovereign. When I was six, plenty of times.”

“See,” joker bae said, “The cycle is irreversible. This is to say that I do not understand Katniss Everdeen and her motivation with the boy with the bread and that one time incident thing because her mom, her Gale macho, her sister, all of them gave her bread and I personally can’t decide who gave me the most bread and how come I pay some

back some bread and not other bread and now without the yellow diamond that I just destroyed!”

The girl and the sovereign emperor blinked and breathed and swallowed.

“Gaisen,” the sovereign then said, “take Brett to my dungeon please, as I promised. Though I should try him for treason, he will be released after six days and seven nights, my favor. And give him bread and water. The boy looks famished.”

Joker bae walked over to the sovereign emperor and a troop shoved him away with a stick, but the sovereign emperor lifted his thumb and commanded the troop to scurry away. The joker bae looked woke.

“Sovereign emperor, thank you, and debt your life, at least it’s a reminder you’re still livin’ and matter.”

Zoha Arif will graduate from the Academy for Information Technology in the spring of 2021. She lives in the lands of Union, New Jersey and melts away her free time breathing peanut butter, eating books, drowning in questionable food science experiments, chasing squirrels, pondering computer science, and saturating her muses into her works of fiction and creative nonfiction. Her work has been published in Polyphony Lit, the Blue Marble Review, Parallax Literary, and others.